Intelligence Conference - Webster
Texas A&M University

Judge William Webster
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Tape 1 (Side A)

George Edwards: Ladies and gentlemen. I seem to keep introducing myself, and I'll only do it a couple more times during this conference. I'm George Edwards, the Director of the Center for Presidential Studies here at the Bush School. On behalf of the Bush School, I'd like to welcome you to the Conference on US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War which is co-sponsored by the Center for Presidential Studies, and the CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence. We're delighted that you could not only attend this conference but also share this special evening with us. Most of you are from out of town, and we understand that it sometimes takes a bit of work to get to Texas A&M. I should tell you that when we sought President Bush's Library, we did produce maps showing that Texas A&M was the center of the known universe. We also understand that not everyone agrees with that point. At any rate, to welcome you properly to Texas A&M, it is my pleasure to introduce the Provost of Texas A&M, Dr. Ron Douglas. [applause]

Ron Douglas: Thank you very much, George. Good evening, and welcome to Texas A&M. As I know you have heard by now, this is a rather tragic day at Texas A&M. Many people have spent most of the day rescuing students and comforting families and friends. And we recognized that at the minute we had before that, and much of that goes

on, and, as you know, we are just concluding a memorial service. Still, I want to wish you and thank you....welcome you here and thank you for being here. President Bowen, as you might guess, was at the memorial service and regrets not being able to be here tonight. I'd like to, however, welcome you and thank you very much for inviting us, my wife Bunny and myself. We're glad to be able to join you here. We're very pleased and excited to be hosting the Conference that has brought so many of you to Texas A&M. I understand your Conference topic is "US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War." In fact, I saw a little bit of the exhibition by that name. But, in many ways, the end of the Cold War was not an end, but a beginning. And Texas A&M is part of this new beginning. Today, we count among our student body more than 100 students from former Soviet republics and Soviet Bloc nations. More than 30 of these students hail from Russia, itself. These are students who would not have been able to come here just a decade ago. They come here to study engineering and the sciences. They study economics. They study agriculture. And when they have completed their education, they will return home to help build new nations. Together we are building a new world, one that many dared not dream possible just a few years ago. To those of you who are here this evening who helped bring about this new world through your service to our Government, I say, "Thank you." The world owes you a debt of gratitude for the seeds you helped to sow, and we at Texas A&M will help to cultivate the crop of hope that now grows, thanks to you. Again, I thank you for being here, and I hope you will have a wonderful Conference. [applause]

GE: Thank you very much, Ron. I have two announcements before we introduce our speaker for this evening. We had anticipated that President Bush would be here. And President Bush is, right now, upstairs meeting with families from the memorial service. He will not be here this evening, but you will see him tomorrow. And, of course, he's speaking at lunch, so he sends his regrets and I pass them on to you. Now I have one announcement for those who are speakers in our Conference. There are many representatives of the national press here, and we're very pleased to have them attend this Conference. Every session, except for this evening, is open to the press and, undoubtedly, there will be many requests to interview you. If you're willing to be interviewed, please let Bill Harlow and Tom Crispell know. And they are right here and they will raise their hands so you can identify them easily. And we have asked the press to let Bill and Tom to serve as clearinghouses for interviews, but it's inevitable that some of you will be contacted directly, and, naturally, you will respond as you wish. We have, I think, excellent facilities available to accommodate interviews, and Bill and Tom are happy to expedite this process. It's now my pleasure to introduce Lloyd Salvetti, who is Director of CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence. He's also had senior posts in the Operations Directorate of CIA, and also served in the National Security Council. And he will introduce our speaker. Lloyd? [applause]

Lloyd Salvetti: Well, good evening, and welcome on behalf of CIA to this Conference. We join with the Texas A&M family in mourning the loss of life of the several students at the bonfire site. It's a terrible tragedy, and our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, their friends, and the entire Texas A&M community. The Director

of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, extends his personal condolences and prayers to all the victims and their families and friends. He had intended to kick off this Conference by sharing with you his views on the role of intelligence at the end of the Cold War. He very much regrets that he has to delay his arrival at College Station until tomorrow morning, because of a family obligation that requires his presence elsewhere tonight. He intends to be fully involved in the Conference on Friday and Saturday, and will make remarks at tomorrow's lunch along with President Bush. Our speaker tonight is Judge William Webster, the 14th Director of Central Intelligence. Judge Webster has a long record of distinguished public service, beginning with stints in the US Navy in World War II and the Korean War. He came to CIA after having served nine years as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. His leadership of CIA and the Intelligence Community was noted for, among many accomplishments, developing cross-discipline operational and analytical centers, such as the Crime and Narcotics Center, and strengthening relations between the Congress and the Intelligence Community. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Judge William Webster. [applause]

Judge Webster: Thank you very much, Lloyd. Provost Douglas. Ladies and gentlemen. Friends and colleagues. It's a pleasure to be with you tonight, and to fill in for George Tenet as best I am able. I would like to make a few brief comments, along with Lloyd and George and the others who have noted tonight the circumstances in the events of today. We do gather tonight in the midst of a great tragedy here at Texas A&M, and although many of the Conference participants have only just arrived at College Station, we, too, share the feeling of shock and sorrow that pervades this campus. All of us have

been deeply moved by the spirit of solidarity and compassion that everyone is showing in this crisis—the students, the faculty, the University leadership, the rescue personnel, the townspeople, and the authorities. And we're all most grateful to all those at the University who have worked so long and hard for many months to put this Conference together, and, under these tragic circumstances, we will do everything that we can do ensure that we do not add to their enormous burdens. Our hearts and prayers go out to the families and friends of the students who have died or who have been injured in this terrible accident. Whenever wonderful young lives are lost, we lose a precious piece of our future, a future that all of us here tonight have sought to make more free and more secure for our country and the world.

Well, this Conference has as its subject "US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War." It's one that I take more than scholarly interest in, because the two years 1989-91 that have been identified for special emphasis as the end, happen to coincide—fall within--my term as Director of Central Intelligence. I'm sure that George Tenet would have a much broader and more interesting perspective. When he called me to tell me that he was not going to be able to make it for dinner tonight and would like me to take his place, I asked him if he was still wearing a beard. I thought perhaps I could wear a beard and pass as George Tenet, but George says he's not wearing that beard anymore, and it's just as well. I remember going on a highly classified trip to China toward the end of my tenure, and they requested that I wear dark glasses, a beard, and a mustache. And I said, "I'll do almost anything else, but that." So you have to take me as you find me, and I hope that some of my views will coincide with so many of you who worked with me during those memorable years as the Cold War came to a conclusion. The CIA's Center

for the Study of Intelligence and the Bush School of Government for Presidential Studies have done a really terrific job in organizing this event. It was their inspired idea to bring those who presided over our national security and intelligence communities in the final phase of the Cold War together with the scholars who can tell us what we were really thinking and doing, or what we should have been thinking and doing. Each of us has arrived at the Conference with unique experiences and strong opinions, and that will make for interesting discussions. The Conference will be even more lively, I think, and enlightening if we also come to it with open minds. One of the reasons that this Conference is so valuable is that it allows us all, especially the intelligence officers and policy makers who intensely lived those fateful years, to view events, judgments and decisions with greater objectivity and clarity. There is one thing, however, that I see exactly the same way as I did ten years ago. I look with great pride on the men and women of US intelligence, who serve this country with enormous intellectual integrity, skill, and daring. And I will always be grateful to Presidents Reagan and Bush for the privilege of working with such talented and dedicated professionals, such as Dick Kerr and Bob Gates, at my side, and with other wonderful intelligence officers throughout the Community, many of whom are here tonight. And I think I should mention that we are very pleased to have with us an important icon of our profession, who was in this struggle from the early days, and who has been a great friend and neighbor and mentor to me, Dick Helms. [applause]

Historically speaking, a decade is an instant. But now is not too soon to begin systematically discussing and recording for posterity what happened ten years ago, and why. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, our Chief of Station gave me a piece of the

Wall on a base that was inscribed with the years "1961 to 1989." By coincidence, 1961 was the year that my youngest daughter was born, and 1989 was the year her daughter was born. My daughter's generation lived for all those years under the cloud symbolized by the Berlin Wall, and now my ten-year-old granddaughter has grown up in a totally new world. And I'm glad that the record of her granddad and others' efforts and those of his colleagues as the Cold War was ending, will be available to her and others when she is old enough to have an interest, and, perhaps, learn from it, along with others who will have responsibility for serving and being good citizens in this country. I've always seen it as a blessing, not a burden, for US intelligence to be an integral part of America's democratic system, accountable for our actions and the quality of our work to the elected leaders, and, ultimately, to the American people. An important part of accountability is providing declassified information to fill the gaps in the historical record. The public has a right to know what the Intelligence Community did during the Cold War, and how well we performed. It was fascinating for me to reacquaint myself with the documents that were declassified for this Conference. I know that you have all enjoyed reading them and have been reminded of the times in which they came out and the circumstances. Many of these materials, particularly those dealing with military strategic issues, contain data once considered among the most sensitive held by the Intelligence Community. I understand that many more Cold War-era documents have been, or will be, made available through the National Archives and Records Administration. Never before has the Intelligence Community voluntarily released Cold War records of such recent vintage, and no other US institution or foreign intelligence community has produced anything comparable. Ours is, indeed, the most open intelligence system in the world. We know that there are

many things about which we cannot be open, but we are discharging our responsibility to the public where information can be used to inform them and to guide future actions.

I know how difficult it is to launch a project of this kind. Declassification is a painstaking, time- and labor-intensive process, and there will be many who will give arguments about why something should be released when it cannot, in fact, be released in order to protect sources and methods and our national security. But, before its release, every word must be reviewed and re-reviewed by experts throughout the Intelligence Community, to ensure that nothing precious is compromised. The entire effort requires exceptional judgment, and a serious commitment to as much openness as the protection of sources and methods and sensitive foreign relationships will permit. As I browsed through the documents, I was struck anew by how rapidly and profoundly the East-West strategic struggle changed, and the dynamics of it. Admiral Stansfield Turner, who was a classmate of mine at Amherst before the War, was in office at CIA as DCI when I came to Washington with the FBI. He used to give these wonderful talks without using a single crib note, and I asked him how he did it. He said, "It's not hard. I work out a speech and then I give it for six months, and then I revise it a little, and I give it for six more months." In many ways, this was the kind of world we were in when I took office in 1987. Our Soviet experts were listening and looking for telling little hiccups in the Soviet Union that might signal important change, such as a stand-up, breakout offensive on the European continent. By the time I had left office on Labor Day 1991, the Richter scale had gone off the charts. Just the month before, the hardliners had attempted to overthrow Gorbachev, destroy perestroika, and derail US-Soviet relations. Gorbachev survived the coup, but soon fell victim to the very forces of reform that he had unleashed.

By December, the Communist Party, Gorbachev, and the USSR were history. Glacial change had become upheaval. Attempts at reform had unleashed revolutionary change. One overriding threat had dissolved into many competing ones. Dangers of strength had been replaced by dangers of weakness. Central controls had disintegrated. An entire empire had collapsed, pulled asunder by resurgent nationalism. Certainty had turned into uncertainty. Most important of all, totalitarian oppression had given way to a burst of democratic freedom.

But what role did US intelligence play in all this, and did we see it coming? To answer the question, some of it was anticipated very early. For instance, the prediction in the early 1950s: "The Iron Curtain will lift and the captive nations of the East will become a part of a united Europe. Even Russian, purged of its desire to bully and subdue its neighbors, will be a member and a highly respected and valued member. When Europe is truly unified, it will flourish and Communism will be shown for what it is, not the wave of the future at all, but a dead ideology out of a cruel past which has been employed by cynical masters to control common mankind." Those predictions were made by Wild Bill Donovan, the father of modern American intelligence. And Bill Donovan is still ahead of events on a few of these forecasts. Forecasts are difficult for those of us in the intelligence.....we know what the facts indicate is happening, is happening, trying to predict what will happen and, more particularly, when it will happen, is far more difficult. Perhaps that is why Dick Helms' favorite.....is remembered for saying that "the Central Intelligence Agency is not a for profit agency." In all seriousness, I think our analyses do stand up well against 20-20 hindsight. What, then, do the documents tell us, and, more importantly, what difference did they make? Time

doesn't permit me to comment, but I have to make one comment on how the analysts got the information upon which to make their estimates. And it would be wrong for me not to recognize those gallant men and women who served in the field, collecting human intelligence throughout the world, and those who worked upon our imagery from products from satellites in the sky to make it possible to provide the information upon which our analysts made important and significant judgments. We owe them all a debt of gratitude.

But tonight we're talking about analysis. Let me begin by stating that I think the evidence refutes the common charge, a charge that regrettably has already made its way into some history books, that US intelligence failed to apprise policy makers of the Soviet Union's grave economic problems, that we counseled that Moscow would continue indefinitely to wage the Cold War, and the arms race. The Estimates also refute the allegations that US intelligence failed to anticipate the collapse of the Soviet power in Eastern and Central Europe, and then in the USSR, itself. We didn't just call it right, we called it as we saw it. I hope those of you who have been looking at the enormous weight of evidence in those materials available for this Conference, and what they reflect in the even more enormous weight of unclassified material, as Doug MacEachin pointed out, that have always been available, always available to the public and the press and others with respect to where our thinking was taking us. The Estimates should also allay any suspicions that the Intelligence Community politicized intelligence, or catered to what it perceived as the White House view or the policy of the day. In some cases, you will see open debate, competing hypotheses, and even strong dissents registered in the same Estimate. Some Generals didn't like that. Others in Congress complained that there

wasn't enough of it. But Estimates sometimes contained facts and projections that were not always welcome by senior policymakers. And that is the job of intelligence. To tell it like it is, as we see it, and let the chips fall. Case in point. By early 1989, CIA was warning policymakers of the deepening crisis in the Soviet Union, and the growing likelihood of an implosion of the old order. Perestroika meant catastroika for the Soviet system. In other words, Gorbachev's reforms were creating the opposite of their intended result. Some policymakers complained we were overly pessimistic, alarmist even. Bob Gates, at that time Deputy to Brent Scowcroft, took the message seriously. With President Bush's direct approval, he established a TOP SECRET, high-level, contingency planning group to prepare for the possibility of a Soviet collapse and its potentially bloody consequences. That group was chaired by NSC Soviet Affairs Director, Condoleeza Rice. Despite their gloom and doom, as Bob Gates said of the Estimates, these reports convinced the Bush Administration to move quickly to seal as many advantageous agreements as possible with the Gorbachev government.

It's clear that our Estimates played a vital role in defining US defense and national security issues. The series on Soviet Forces and Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict, which may be the most important series of all, helped several American Presidents to keep our defenses strong and confidently conclude arms control agreements with Moscow. Ten years ago, in a commencement address here at Texas A&M, President Bush stated that despite the improved prospects for US-Soviet relations, the United States would adhere to the principle of deterrence and mutual assured destruction as the basis of our defense policy. That decision was based, in part, on a National Intelligence Estimate, which concluded that, despite political changes and economic

pressures, the Soviet Union was continuing to build new missiles and modernizing its strategic arsenal in spite of Gorbachev's peaceful rhetoric. At the same time, however, our Estimates were showing a different picture with respect to Soviet conventional forces. There we noted that, as Gorbachev had promised, he was withdrawing troops and weapons from Eastern Europe and reducing by 500,000, Soviet general purpose forces. In the summer of 1990, during the second Bush-Gorbachev summit, the Soviet leader took me by both shoulders, looked me in the eye with a twinkle, and said, "Watch everything we do and ask a lot of questions." I said, "You can count on it." And that is just what we were doing. Already by September of 1989, we had assessed that a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, launched with little or no warning, was no longer a realistic threat, and outlined the implications of the withdrawal of the massive Soviet military machine aimed at NATO. Secure in that knowledge, that information, the US was able to withdraw troops, armor and materiel from Western Europe and redeploy them to the Persian Gulf for DESERT STORM. As I recall, some 500,000 troops and equipment were taken out because of the Estimates that told us where we were and that we could do it safely.

A final point on getting it right. On the eve of the failed coup of August 1991, just a month before my scheduled departure as DCI, the President's Daily Intelligence Brief, the PDB, warned the White House that an attempt against Gorbachev was highly likely. Of course, after the coup, there was a flurry of press stories about an alleged intelligence failure. After the coup attempt, many, on both sides of the US-Soviet relationship, thought that it would be wise to retreat to a pre-Malta wait-and-see posture. Above all, do nothing that would change or disturb the situation. Instead, President Bush,

certain that the Soviet Union no longer posed a direct threat to NATO, initiated a number of important new arms control proposals and took unilateral steps to convince Moscow of our peaceful intentions. These initiatives, which were based on a series of intelligence assessments, were aimed at convincing the Soviets to shrink their strategic nuclear arsenal to the lowest possible level, and eliminate tactical nuclear weapons that, in a worst case scenario, might end up in dangerous hands. In sum, I believe that a careful examination of these newly-released documents, shows that US intelligence contributed key information and insights that helped American policymakers bring the most protracted and most dangerous conflict of the 20th Century, to a peaceful end. Again, we cannot always know precisely when and fix the precise date. Dick Kerr was able to do that 12 hours before Iraq invaded Kuwait, but, in general, the important thing is to see it coming in sufficient time to do something about it. And, I think, that's what your review of these assessments and our discussions during the next few days will bear out.

Of course, some of the most interesting things we can explore at this Conference are what the documents don't reveal, what they can't tell us, but what the policymakers and professionals who live through this traumatic period can, and who, hopefully, those who are here, will do so. When I was DCI, I always reminded my analysts that policymakers can read intelligence estimates. They can tear them up, they can ignore them, they can do anything they want with them except change them. That is the essence of integrity. Did our estimates tell decision makers anything new? Anything they couldn't get from other sources? And all of the decision makers had other sources. I recall the many sources in the Gulf War that told them that no Arab country would ever invade another Arab country. Beyond the intelligence we provided, and, hopefully, we

reached our decision makers in time to be helpful, what other factors were driving policymakers' thinking and actions? How did our intelligence judgments measure up to contemporaneous assessments from outside the Intelligence Community? What important facts or trends did we miss or insufficiently consider? What can we learn from this Conference that will help maximize the effectiveness of US intelligence in the future? And I, and I'm sure, all of you, look forward to spirited discussions on these issues.

A very few closing thoughts. My good friend, the late Sir William Stephenson, better known as the man called INTREPID, told me that when anyone asked him what was the most important attribute of a good intelligence officer, his answer was always, "Integrity." He once wrote, "Among the increasingly intricate arsenals across the world, intelligence is an essential weapon, perhaps the most important, but it is being secret, the most dangerous. As in all enterprises, the character and wisdom of those to whom it is entrusted will be decisive. In the integrity of that guardianship lies the hope of free people to endure and prevail. During the bleak, Cold War decades, hope did endure, and freedom, at last, prevailed." And I believe that the integrity of the facts and assessments in these documents which we will study together, and the personal integrity of the men and women who produced them, played a critical role in that remarkable outcome, and I am proud to have served with you in that effort. Thank you. [applause]

GE: Thank you very much, Judge Webster, for getting us off to such an excellent beginning to our conference. We wish you good evening. Transportation awaits you,

right outside at the circle in the front of the Presidential Library. And we'll see you all bright and early tomorrow morning. Thank you for attending.

Tape 1 (Side B) (Blank)

Tape 2 (Side A)